

Persecution of Christians in Israel

*Some facts about Israel strangely ignored
by so-called Christian leaders*

BY JOHN MITCHELL HENSHAW

THE WORLD Council of Churches and all Catholic and Protestant religious denominations have ignored the persecution of Christians in Israel. And, not one prominent clergyman has spoken out against the persecution. Moreover, the world news media has been strangely silent about the mistreatment of Christians in the Holy Land.

In Jerusalem recently there have been two arson attacks on the Mount of Olives Bible Center and the Mount Zion Press, and a third attack, the bombing of an apartment occupied by a leader of the "Jews for Jesus" movement, which was founded by the Rev. Moishe Rosen, in July 1970. He was reared as a Jew, converted to Christianity, was ordained a Baptist minister, and later worked for the American Board of Missions to the Jews.

Rosen has actively sought converts to his position that it is possible to accept the divinity of Jesus while being a practicing Jew. His missionary work has drawn strong reactions from Jewish religious leaders in the U.S. as well as in Israel.

A few weeks ago, Rabbi Mordecai Simon, executive director of the Chicago Board of Rabbis said bluntly: "He distorts the significance and the meaning of Judaism, its heritage, its history, and the traditions by maintaining his platform that Jesus is an extension of Judaism. The Rev. Rosen is not only perverting Judaism, but he is misleading the public."

Rosen's "Jews for Jesus" and other missionaries are making inroads in Israel. Since 1967 6,000 Jews have become Christian converts, despite strong opposition. The Israeli government has become alarmed and is going to crack down. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and her cabinet have recommended to the Knesset (parliament) a proposal to enact legislation banning the work of some 1,000 missionaries now active in Israel. With the power the National Religious party wields in Israeli politics, the adoption of such a proposal is almost a foregone conclusion.

The mal-treatment of missionaries is exemplified by the following case: On last Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Arnold Butler, a Christian missionary from San Jose, Calif., was handing out free copies of the New Testament near the Wailing Wall when he was arrested, jailed, subjected to brutal police third-degree inquisition, heavily fined and imprisoned. Very recently Butler was released from prison and expelled from Israel. What will be the fate of all Christian missionaries in Israel when the new law against missionary activities is enacted by the Knesset?

Acts of Violence

Rabbi Meir Kahane, leader of the notorious Jewish Defense League, and his armed thugs committed acts of violence against Arab missions at the United Nations in New York. Rabbi Kahane has set up a JDL storm

troop unit in Israel, which is conducting a reign of terror against Christians; Holy Christian shrines have been desecrated, Jewish Christian converts have been beaten and no arrests were made. But when the Mount of Olives Bible Center was burned, eight members of Kahane's organization were arrested but quickly released. "Jews for Jesus" converts are a special target of Rabbi Kahane's mobsters.

As of this writing, Kahane has held a one-day hunger strike at the Wailing Wall, in protest against missionary activity. He preached: "I don't like soul-snatching. If you lose a Jew in Auschwitz or through conversion, it's still a lost soul to our people."

Jewish converts to the Christian faith are not the only victims of religious intolerance. The shameful degradation of the Christian Maronites is a dirty blot on the escutcheon of Israel. The Maronites are one of the oldest Christian sects in the Middle East, dating back to the 5th Century. There were more than 10,000 Maronites in Palestine under the British Mandate. There are now less than 5,000 of them left in Israel in spite of their high birthrate. Their ancestors first came to Palestine at the time of the Arab invasion of Syria in the 8th century and especially after the Crusaders came to the defense of Christians against the Saracens. The Maronite communities of Ikrit and Baram, near the Lebanese border, were "temporarily" evacuated during the 1948 Arab-Zionist war. The then Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion promised the Maronites that they could reoccupy their villages and farmland as soon as law and order could be restored in Israel. Moreover, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Maronites were the legal owners of their native properties from which they had been illegally evicted. The villages of Ikrit and Baram remained vacant for four years, while the Maronites squatted in hovels a bare

two miles away. And then in 1952 Israeli soldiers dynamited the houses while the dispossessed Maronites watched in horror from a nearby hill and wept.

Plight is Ignored

While the world news media blithely ignored the plight of the Maronites, two of the largest circulation Hebrew newspapers in Israel, *Haaretz* and *Yediot Ahronot* surprisingly reported the persecution of the Maronites. *Haaretz*, on June 30, 1972, in an article by Amon Rubenstein, Dean of Law at Tel-Aviv University, wrote:

"The inhabitants of Baram and Ikrit, who responded positively to the request of evacuating their villages for a short while, found themselves, all of a sudden, homeless refugees. The temporary evacuation turned out to be permanent expulsion. Their lands were expropriated according to an Israeli law which itself violates the basic notions of the rule of law. Jewish settlements were established on their lands and, thus, we can see how the village evacuees became hired agricultural workers on their own land."

Yediot Ahronot, on July 28, 1972, wrote: "... those evacuees of the Maronite village near the border of Lebanon are working on their own lands as wage laborers, hired by Kibbutz Baram and Moshav Dovev. . . ."

On July 14, 1972, the same newspaper wrote: "... it seems to me that most of the Maronites in the Galilee and Lebanon are the survivors of Jewish villages whose inhabitants converted to Christianity in the oppressive period of Byzantine rule. The inhabitants of Baram and Ikrit have very Jewish eyes, and the Aramaic language in which their prayers are written also strengthens this supposition. Finally, all my spiritual motivation whispers to me: they must be treated well and returned to their inherited land. But here I find myself in painful conflict with my Zionist conscience. My Zionist conscience whispers to me: when the settling of the Jews in the inherited land of Eretz Israel is spoken of, you must not be sentimental. You, in fact, must adamantly reject the Biblical command to exterminate



the Canaanite, the inhabitant of the country, and abstain from carrying it out."

Struggles With Conscience

Apparently other Jewish writers also have their struggles with their conscience. According to *Haaretz*, August 11, 1972, twenty of the most prominent Israeli journalists convened at the home of Prime Minister Golda Meir to plead the cause of the dispossessed Maronites "to return to their villages, which were extorted from them by means of cheating and violence in that week of 1948 in which they welcomed the Israeli soldiers with bread and salt. The explanations sounded to us so hollow that, realizing our bewilderment, Minister Galili, who sat in at the conference, noted that apparently he and I were living on separate planets. . . . There were among the writers men of the whole land of Israel, the New Left and all that is between; at times the discussion reached the intensity of entreaty on our part that justice be done to the oppressed. The Prime Minister was as immovable in her stand as the Northern Star. And there she stayed. The problem of Ikrit and Baram is no longer a Maronite problem. It is a Jewish problem. The Prime Minister is unresponsive

not only to Archbishop Raya, who speaks on behalf of the inhabitants of Ikrit, but also to ourselves and our words are worthless to her. As a typical and even an outstanding Bolshevik personality, she simply believes we do not have enough divisions. The defenseless, the weak are superfluous in her eyes, if she sees them at all."

We have quoted extensively from those two leading newspapers of Israel because they are authentic first-hand information sources.

How long can we continue to delude ourselves, after 26 years, that Israel is not a police state?—even while the Israeli Government continues to multiply its restrictive laws and increase police and military authority.

While the Zionists are blatantly persecuting the Christians in Israel, they are ever prone to hurl epithets like "bigot," "racist," "fascist," "nazi" and "hitlerite" at anyone who dares criticize the imperialist expansionist schemes of World Zionism.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the ultimate goals of the Zionists are not merely to establish a homeland for dispossessed Jews in Palestine.

Inflation is itself an immoral act on the part of government.

When modern governments inflate by increasing the paper-money supply, directly or indirectly, they do in principle what kings once did when they clipped the coins. Diluting the money supply with paper is the moral equivalent of diluting the milk supply with water.

HENRY HAZLITT